



**PROBE REPORT
ON HARASSMENT
OF JOURNALISTS
DURING GEITA
SCHOOL RUMPUS**

Probe report on harassment of journalists during Geita school rumpus



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This report is a result of coordinated efforts by the MCT secretariat, the investigators, the victims in the incident and other stakeholders who together made it possible for this report to come out.

The probe team was composed of team leader Hamis Mzee – editor with the Media Council of Tanzania, and members Peter Nyanje – the online editor of Mwananchi Communications Limited; Juma Thomas – High Court advocate and veteran journalist; Paul Mallimbo – Programme Officer – Media Monitoring at MCT and Robert Mutta from the Geita Press Club.

MCT is indebted to the team members for devoting their invaluable time and all stakeholders for their constructive responses, comments, opinions and suggestions.

ABBREVIATIONS

MCT	–	Media Council of Tanzania
IDEI	-	International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists
RC	–	Regional Commissioner
PFVR	–	Press Freedom Violation Register
GPC	–	Geita Press Club
RPC	–	Regional Police Commander
OCD	–	Officer Commanding District
DC	–	District Commissioner
DEFIR	–	Dar es Salaam Editorial Freedom, Independence and Responsibility
RAS	–	Regional Administrative Secretary

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 A few days before the world marked International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI) on November 2, the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) picked a five-member team to probe allegations of violence against journalists in Geita.

Three women journalists, who are members of the Geita Press Club (GPC), were reportedly beaten and roughed up by police when they were covering an incident involving rampaging students at Geita Secondary School.

It was definitely a rare coincidence that the rights of journalists were violated as the world was close to marking IDEI, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its 68th session in 2013, urging Member States to take measures to counter the culture of impunity.

In marking the occasion on November 2, MCT came out with a strong statement pledging to take to court perpetrators of acts of brutality against journalists. It was no longer going to be business as usual with journalists taking a beating lying down, the Council warned.

Article 3 (e) of the Constitution of the Council obliges it to maintain a register of developments likely to restrict the supply of information of public interest and importance, keep a review of the same, investigate the conduct and attitude of persons, corporations and governmental bodies at all levels towards the media and issue public reports on such investigations.

The Council has maintained a Press Freedom Violation Register (PFVR) since 2012 which records misdeeds against journalists, including denial of access to information, threats, murder, harassment, arrest, kidnap, assault, battery, bans, violent or forceful eviction, confiscation of equipment, damaging of equipment and cyber attacks.

It is on the strength of this article that the Council initiated an investigation to establish exactly what happened at Geita Secondary School, where journalists, apart from being manhandled by police, were also harassed by some teachers.

2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following reports that some journalists pursuing a story on student skirmishes at Geita Secondary School had been manhandled by the police and some teachers, MCT dispatched a team of investigators to follow the matter up and establish exactly what had happened.

The Council, alarmed by increasing acts of press freedom violation, picked the team comprising mainly of old hands in journalism. The team left Dar es Salaam on October 27, 2017, six days after the reported fracas at the school. It arrived in Geita, via Mwanza, on the same day.

The problem started on October 21, 2017 after students at Geita Secondary School protested against the arrest of four schoolmates by police a day earlier for allegedly attacking their fellow student.

The students went on the rampage, destroying school property and boycotting food as a result. This prompted the school committee to suspend all A-Level students, pending an investigation into the incident.

The suspended students were asked to go and collect their letters before leaving the school premises.

This is what journalists went to cover, but it happened that the students were being beaten and frog-marched by police and teachers during this exercise. This could be what the authorities wanted to prevent journalists from reporting.

It was the second time in the year the Council had set up a team to investigate instances of press freedom violation.

In May it had set up a team to investigate the invasion on March 17, 2017 of Clouds Media Group studios by the Dar es Salaam Regional Commissioner, who was accompanied by heavily armed men. The verdict from the findings of the MCT investigating team was that the RC had flagrantly encroached on editorial independence.

In the Geita case, the fact that journalists were manhandled and some beaten by police and their work interrupted by a section of teachers justified MCT's decision to initiate the investigation.

The journalists who reported to have been manhandled are Rehema Mtowo of Mwananchi, Esther Sumila of Azam TV and Editha Edward of Mtanzania. The investigators from Dar es Salaam were joined by a Geita-based journalist, increasing the number of team members to five. They interviewed and held discussions with a number of people, including the assaulted journalists, top leaders of GPC, a top municipal leader, senior police officers in the region, the headmaster of Geita Secondary School, students from Geita Secondary School and a media products consumer. The team conducted the interviews and discussions with various people for four days, and returned to Dar es Salaam on October 31, 2017.

Through the interviews, the team established that the journalists were actually manhandled and harassed, with some beaten up by police.

Police's motive for beating the journalists was to stop them from reporting the fallout at the school, especially the way police beat up and frog-marched students during the exercise to issue suspension letters.

Police knew the journalists quite well, and that is why they were alarmed when they saw them, prompting the law enforcers to ask the journalists to explain who had called them to the school.

During the investigation, it was also established that what the Regional Police Commander, Mponjoli Mwabulambo, told the team that police were in an operation to disperse people and did not recognise the journalists was not correct, as the journalists confirmed that some of the police officers pleaded with their colleagues not to be rough on them.

The fact that the Officer Commanding District (OCD), Ali Kitumbu, who was leading the detail at the school, repeatedly apologised to the journalists after they were roughed up by police, some of whom were reportedly from the police depot – police parlance for training – shows that police knew that they did not act properly by mistreating the scribes.

It was equally surprising for the RPC to have claimed that he was not aware that journalists were harassed because he had not received any complaint from either the journalists themselves or their leaders at Geita Press Club.

He claimed that he became aware of the issue following the decision by the Geita Press Club to impose a blackout on news related to police in the region, a move which he also dismissed as inconsequential as he had been discharging his police duties for a long time without media coverage.

He also claimed it was unfair for the Geita Press Club to take such a 'severe' measure against police and publish it nationwide without giving the Police Force the right to respond.

Generally, media practitioners who spoke to the team were of the view that the RPC was not cooperative, and they found it difficult not only to get a story from him, but also when they wanted to balance their stories.

They claimed that the RPC mostly discouraged them by asking them to call him later and he sometimes harangued them endlessly.

Apart from police, some Geita Secondary School teachers also prevented a TV journalist from taking photos. They took a camera from a journalist, and only returned it at the behest of the OCD. In preventing the journalist from taking photos, the teachers demanded to know who had permitted her to do so. The camera was slightly damaged.

At this juncture, it dawned on the investigating team that journalists operated in a difficult environment in Geita. One has to get permission to get a story or a photo from relevant officials.

In the case of the school, journalists had to seek permission from the Town Council Director, Engineer Modest Apolinary, to take photos of the premises and the damage caused by the rioting students. For other offices and institutions, the permission of the Regional Administrative Secretary is mandatory. The RAS is also reportedly not cooperative and easily accessible to the media.

While the MCT team was able to meet with the Town Council Director to get a briefing on what had happened at the school in his area, he was reluctant to allow them to interview the school headmaster.

He told the team that because the Form Four national examination had started, it was not possible for them to meet the headmaster during office hours, and asked the team to check with him later in the evening. When the team later tried to reach the Town Council Director for his permission to meet the headmaster, he did not respond to several phone calls. However, the team managed to meet the headmaster at the school through their own initiative. For his part, the headmaster said that he agreed to talk to the team because he had earlier seen them at the offices of the Town Council Director.

It is the view of the team that the process of getting information in the region, where some officials are overly powerful and have a monopoly of information, is cumbersome, improper and in direct contravention to the basic democratic and universal rights of access to information, freedom of expression and press freedom.

There needs to be easy access to information, with heads of departments or institutions at regional or district level obliged to be able to speak freely about their respective departments.

3.0 BACKGROUND:

3.1 Geita Press Club has 21 members, but there are also a number of journalists who are not members of the Club, taking to 40 the number of journalists in the region. The journalists report for all major media outlets in the country, both print and electronic.

Geita Secondary School is a boys' day and boarding public school with some 2,000 students, out of whom 500 are studying for their Advanced-level certificates, while the rest are doing their Ordinary-level studies. Records show that the school has been plagued by student unrests almost every year. Even the school's headmaster admitted this fact.

4.0 Probe team composition

The probe team comprised team leader Hamis Mzee – editor with the Media Council of Tanzania, and members, Peter Nyanje – the on-line editor of Mwananchi Communications Limited; Juma Thomas – High Court advocate and veteran journalist; Paul Mallimbo – Programmes officer, Media Monitoring at MCT, and Robert Mutta from the Geita Press Club. The team started work on Friday October 27, 2017 upon the arrival of the four members in Geita from Dar es Salaam.

5.0 Terms of reference of the probe

5.1 The probe team was mandated, among other things, to:-

Establish what actually happened on October 21, 2017 in Geita regarding journalists covering incidents involving Geita Secondary School students

To determine the reasons as to why the reporters were harassed and denied information and the authorities involved

To investigate relations between media practitioners and security organs in Geita Region

To investigate relations between media practitioners and regional as well as district authorities in the region

To investigate incidences of press freedom violations, including assaults and threats posed by security organs to the safety of journalists in Geita Region

To enquire on the overall working environment of Geita Region journalists and examine if there are indicators of danger while conducting their duties

6.0 THE MODUS OPERANDI

6.1 The approach taken by the probe team in obtaining facts relating to the unrest was mainly by interviewing those involved and reference to materials such as newspaper reports, recordings, video clips and statements.

7.0 INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTS OF THE GEITA SCHOOL SAGA:-

7.1 Geita Press Club

The first port of call after arrival in Geita was the Geita Press Club. The team met with GPC Chairman Daniel Limbe, Secretary Salum Maige, Coordinator Alex Sayi and several other journalists.

In his briefing, Limbe confirmed that three journalists – Rehema Mtowo, Esther Sumila of Azam TV, Editha Edward of Mtanzania and Emmanuel Ibrahim of Clouds – had been harassed by police while covering unrest at Geita Secondary School on Saturday, October 21, 2017.

Limbe said relations between journalists and police were strained, and after the recent incident whereby journalists were once again ill-treated by police, they decided not to report anything about the Police Force in the region, especially if it involved the Regional

Police Commander.

He cited three previous incidents in which police harassed journalists and prevented them from performing their duties. In response to the increasing tendency among police to ill-treat journalists, the Geita Press Club resolved to stop covering police activities in the region until police apologised and stopped mistreating journalists.

He added that even relations between the media and other public leaders were not satisfactory.

According to Limbe, on the day of the unrest involving students, the first journalist to arrive at the scene was Rehema Matowo, who was, however, blocked by police from reporting. She was detained in the sentry room at the gate entrance and had her mobile phone taken away.

Another journalist, Editha Edward, who had also gone to cover the incident, was harassed and beaten up by police. She was manhandled by male police officers, who pushed her into the school compound from outside the school gate.

The third reporter, Emmanuel Ibrahim, arrived on his motorcycle at the scene, where police impounded the motorcycle keys after accusing him of not wearing a safety helmet. Esther Sumila, another reporter, was roughed up and her camera damaged by teachers, who did not want her to record the incident at the school.

7.2 Rehema Matowo

Rehema Matowo was the first journalist to arrive at the school at around noon after a tipoff by motorcycle (bodaboda) riders. She said that on arrival at the school, she started to interview some students, who were outside the school gate, about what was happening.

However, even before she had taken out her notebook, a policeman pounced on her and demanded to know what she was doing there. She started to introduce herself, but another police officer came along and arrested her. Despite introducing herself and the fact that the policeman who arrested her knew her, she was unceremoniously pushed around and detained in the sentry room at the school gate.

Sensing that she might be in danger, she started to make calls, first her superiors at Mwananchi Communications Limited headquarters and later her colleagues in Geita. When police officers noticed that she was making calls, they took away her mobile phone.

A few minutes later, one of the police officers came and took her from the cubicle.

She started to cry because she knew that she had not done anything illegal, and that as a journalist she had the right to report such incidents. 'I was crying because what police were doing to me was unfair and uncalled for.'

After a few minutes, the officers came back, this time in a friendly manner, and returned her phone. The OCD also came along and apologised to her for what had happened.

She was then escorted to the headmaster, whom she interviewed for her story. The headmaster also availed several students whom she also interviewed before leaving the school premises without further incident.

She says that while she was at the school, she saw students being beaten and frog-marched on their way to receiving suspension letters. They were then escorted to the school gate and ordered to leave.

Before she left, Editha Edward told her that a police officer beat her with a stick. Matowo said that she believed what police in Geita were doing to journalists was a serious threat to her work. 'If they can do this to a journalist, whom they know and work closely with, what are they capable of doing to other people?'

She says there is a need for top Police Force officers at the headquarters to provide training and guidance to their subordinates upcountry on how to work with the media.

7.3 Editha Edward

Editha was the second journalist to arrive at the school after also being tipped off about the students' strike. She also arrived by bodaboda and disembarked outside the school gate, where she found a number of students, some of who were carrying their belongings.

She said she had forgotten her identity card, and decided to wait outside the gate while someone went to fetch it. But as she waited, she decided to talk to the students who were outside and establish what was happening.

Before the students could talk, three police officers arrived and asked her who she was, although one of them knew her. They accused her of recording the students, but she said she was not recording anything. One of the policemen grabbed her trousers on her waist from the back and started to push her towards the school gate. This was after the officers took her two mobile phones, leaving her only with a notebook and a pen.

One of the policemen started to beat her with a stick on her back and insult her, saying she was arrogant and that they would teach her a lesson. On reaching the school gate, she was beaten once again with the stick and she cried.

The OCD saw her and ordered the policemen to release her. He apologised to her, saying the junior policemen had just reported in Geita from training, and did not know her. But she protested before the OCD, saying even if she had committed any offence, she was not supposed to be treated like a criminal. The law enforcers were supposed to interrogate her and if there was a need for her to be arrested, female police officers should have done so. 'They were not supposed to do what they did. They should have asked who I was, and if I was not permitted to be there, they should have told me so and I would have left immediately.'

The OCD apologised again and helped her by bringing two students for her to interview.

7.4 Esther Sumila and Emmanuel Ibrahim arrived at the school separately. Ibrahim was riding a motorcycle, and police took the motorcycle keys at the gate, but they did not detain him. Esther had a video camera.

Together, they started to look for the headmaster for an interview, but they did not find him. They called the Town Council Director to seek permission to speak to the headmaster and he allowed them to proceed, but the headmaster had already left the school premises.

When they approached the main gate, they saw some teachers, who demanded to know why Esther was recording with her video camera, and she told them that she was only recording some supporting footage of school buildings for a story she planned to file later, adding that she had not filmed the teachers.

One of the teachers stopped her from continuing to film the school buildings. She called the

Town Council Director for permission, and he told her that he had already allowed journalists to do their work at the school.

But the teachers still blocked her from filming and grabbed her camera, which was damaged in the melee. The OCD, who was outside the gate by then, saw the scuffle and came back inside to inquire what was wrong. After Sumila briefed him, he asked the teachers to return the video camera to her. Seeing that her camera has been damaged, Sumila called the Town Council Director and reported the incident. The Director referred her to the Geita District Education Officer, who was directed to follow up the matter.

On Monday, Sumila called the headmaster to report that teachers had damaged her camera. According to Sumila, she had no confrontation with police at the school, but was confronted by teachers.

Asked about relations between the media and Geita leaders, she said that with the exception of a few leaders, notably Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) Celestine Gesimba and the Regional Police Commander (RPC), other leaders cooperated with the media.

As for Ibrahim, police returned the ignition keys of his motorcycle after the intervention of the OCD. Although he was psychologically and emotionally affected by the police action, he felt that the keys were returned to him because he was a journalist. He, however, admitted that he had broken the law by riding a motorcycle without wearing a helmet.

7.5 Nazareth Ndekia –TBC Representative in Geita Region

Although Ndekia was not involved in the confrontation with police and teachers at Geita Secondary School, he was interviewed by the team for his views, taking into consideration the fact that he works with a state-owned media outlet.

Like other members of the media in Geita, Ndekia confirmed that relations between journalists and members of the Police Force, including the RPC, were uneasy. He said that getting information from the RPC was a challenge for many journalists in Geita. He noted that even if a journalist managed to get an interview with the RPC, most of the time the RPC would be dodging questions and posing questions of his own to the journalist.

To confirm that relations between journalists and police were strained, Ndekia said police officers harassed him as he was filming a court building. Although that in itself is not illegal, police accused him of filming accused persons and took his camera and briefly detained him alongside the accused.

Ndekia also said that journalists in the region generally do not have a good working relationship with the Regional Administrative Secretary, who has directed that no public official, especially at the Regional Hospital, should release any information to journalists without his permission.

He accused the RAS of 'putting up a very high wall between himself and journalists". He said journalists were not allowed to directly cover virtually any event involving the RAS, even visits by top government officials. They are usually told to wait to be briefed by the information officer.

'There is a war going on between sources (public leaders) and journalists.'

However, on the other hand, Ndekia said some journalists were also to blame as they based their reporting on their political inclinations.

7.6 Elineema Charles

Charles was interviewed as a consumer of media products. He told the team that he is an avid reader of newspapers and a keen follower of information and news through radio and television. He said he has developed the habit because of his thirst for information, which enables him to make informed decisions.

He thus said that he viewed any attack on journalists as an attack on himself because any such attack impedes his right to be informed as enshrined in the Constitution.

Charles said he was aware of what happened to journalists who went to cover Geita Secondary School students' protests, adding that the incident was a threat, not only to journalists, but the entire community.

According to him, the incident might make journalists apprehensive and reluctant to cover such happenings for fear of their lives. This, he added, would deny people their right to information.

'If the right to gather information is denied, the right to information is also affected.'

He said it was a pity that society did not raise its voice about what happened to journalists at Geita Secondary School.

'There is a danger that if such a trend is allowed to continue, it will reach a point where police will be deciding which newspapers should be published and read by the public.'

Charles urged society to condemn such incidents, noting that many people were not aware that they had a right to information, which, if denied, they could go to court to demand it. He added that people could not enjoy this right if journalists were not free to work without hindrance.

'I have been affected by the suspension of MwanaHalisi and Mawio because I'm an avid reader of the two newspapers.'

7.7 Regional Police Commander

The interview with the RPC was conducted in his office in the presence of the OCD and Senior Superintendent. The RPC told the team categorically that he was not aware of what happened to the journalists who went to cover students' protests at Geita Secondary School.

He said no journalist had filed any official complaint about the alleged abuse by police at Geita Secondary School.

He added that he was thus not in a position to comment anything on allegations of journalists being assaulted by members of the Police Force in the region.

In a statement that shows that he does not work closely with journalists and the media in general, he admitted not knowing many journalists who work in Geita.

He also appeared surprised that the GPC had decided not to cover activities involving the Police Force.

He said, however, that the decision would not affect him or his office because 'the RPC's office has no information that deserves media coverage'. He said his police work was confined to attending to problems facing members of the Police Force and dealing with their files, and this does not make any news that might interest wananchi.

He said he had worked in the region for more than a year and had visited all divisions, and thus did not need media coverage. He added that he does not care if journalists decide to shun him.

Asked if this is what made him disregard the role of media, he said he has been doing a lot to assist journalists in the region, some of who were not aware of his interventions.

For his part, the OCD appeared surprised when he spoke about the GPC's decision to boycott the Police Force. While the RPC said he was not aware of what happened to journalists, the OCD said he had repeatedly apologised to the journalists at Geita Secondary School, and he believed that the issue had been blown out of proportion.

But speaking to the team later, some of the victims wondered why the OCD apologised to them if they were not harassed by police officers.

7.8 Modest Apolinary – Geita Town Council Director

In an interview conducted in his office, the Geita Town Council Director, Modest Apolinary, said Matowo (a journalist writing for Mwananchi) had called him on October 21 complaining that she had been detained when she went to cover students' protests at Geita Secondary School. Later, Sumila called him and complained about the teachers who had prevented her from doing her job and damaged her camera.

He said he called the Education Officer and directed him to ensure that the journalists were not harassed when covering the protest.

But, unfortunately, the journalists did not go to him later to further explain their ordeal and this left him with incomplete information that he could not work on.

But he said that if indeed teachers or any civil servant had beaten a journalist that amounted to a criminal offence warranting a court case.

7.9 Isaya Busagwe – Geita Secondary School Headmaster

The Geita Secondary School Headmaster told the team during an interview at the school that apart from Matowo (Mwananchi), whom he met on the day of the protests, he did not talk to any other journalist. He said he was not aware that Matowo was harassed before they met.

He said by the time most journalists had arrived to cover the protests he had already left the school premises to attend to other responsibilities.

But he heard about teachers harassing one journalist and damaging her camera, but no such complaint had been formally filed with his office.

The headmaster also spoke of the root cause of the student protest. He said a student was severely beaten by schoolmates, who accused him of secretly passing on information to the school administration. The headmaster said those involved in the assault covered their faces with hoods and they also stuffed a piece of cloth into the victim's mouth so that he could not shout for help.

As they continued to beat him at night, they also poured cold water on him.

The headmaster said the assault came to his attention when the victim sought permission to go home for treatment. However, the school authorities could not give him permission, as there was a hospital with better facilities nearby and directed that he be treated there.

Despite the attackers having concealed their faces with hoods, the victim was able to identify four of them. The attackers had threatened to 'finish him off' if he reported the matter to the school administration.

On realising that he had reported the matter, one of the attackers accosted the victim and told him, "So you have reported to the teachers...you're in for it."

The school administration reported the matter to police and the four students were arrested and detained.

7.9 (i) Geita Secondary students

The probe team managed to speak to a group of students on the grounds of anonymity.

A student allegedly disliked by others and dubbed 'an informer' was severely beaten up by others. Both the victim and his alleged attackers were Advance-level students.

After the beating, so the story goes, the alleged informer went to complain to the school's headmaster.

The matter was reported to police, and four students were singled out, arrested and detained. The rest of Advance-level students were infuriated, and demanded the release of their schoolmates, as they felt that the matter which led to their arrest could simply be handled as a disciplinary issue.

They attempted to demonstrate to the police station, but were stopped on the way by police and instead led to a hall in the town centre where the District Commissioner addressed them.

The DC advised the students to go back to school where the Town Council Director would take up the matter and try to resolve it. As time went on, the students' patience ran out and they went on the rampage. Riots broke out before police were called in. As a result, some students spent the night away from the school.

In the meantime, the school board met and resolved to suspend all A-level students for a month.

When the students went to collect their letters of suspension the following day, they faced the wrath of the police. They were hit with sticks and frog-marched as they went to collect the letters. They were subjected to the same treatment on their way out.

It was at this juncture that some of the journalists were also beaten with sticks by the overzealous policemen who, seemed to be enjoying beating the students and anyone who crossed their path, particularly journalists.

8.0 CONCLUSION

8.1 Incidents of violation of media freedom and harassment of journalists have been on the increase. Police and other state agencies have of late been operating with impunity by assaulting, harassing and intimidating media practitioners.

The right and freedom to receive, process and disseminate information, including the right and freedom to express opinion, constitute the cornerstone of democratic, political and economic governance.

The government cannot claim to uphold principles of democracy, human rights and good governance when the media continue to operate under the threat and constant fear of possible attack by police or other members of society.

The right to information and freedom of expression are both part of the collective and individual rights and freedoms. These rights and freedoms are enunciated and protected by African state constitutions and several international and regional instruments.

It is against this background that the MCT set in motion and facilitated the process of developing the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Editorial Freedom, Independence and Responsibility (DEFIR), a document which obliges media stakeholders, including the government, to recognise the importance of editorial freedom and independence.

DEFIR recognises that for the media to be truly free and independent, its practitioners must also be free to perform their duties without fear of interference, harassment, intimidation, restriction or repression from the state or any other public authority.

DEFIR, which was acceded to by media stakeholders, including the government, among others, tasks the state with desisting from using strong-arm tactics such as police intimidation, incarceration of journalists or confiscation and destruction of media equipment, which curb editorial freedom and independence.

The document states that where agents of the state are found to have acted brutally against media practitioners, thorough investigations must be carried out and the culprits dealt with in a firm and transparent manner.

What the investigation team established is that what happened at Geita Secondary School on 21st October 2017 when journalists were assaulted, beaten up and one locked up in a sentry box by policemen and the camera of one of the journalists damaged by the teachers was not only a total violation of media freedom, but also violation of the media practitioners' dignity. It was total humiliation, to say the least.

Worse still, the Geita incident was not the first time police behaved in such an irresponsible manner towards journalists. It has happened in Dodoma, Dar es Salaam and elsewhere, and yet the powers that be seem not to care.

These habitual acts of violence against media practitioners by police are a clear indication that impunity is on the rise.

Journalists have a duty to inform the public what is going on in the country without fear or favour, and police ought to protect rather than intimidate them. The action by police does not only cause pain, but also instils fear in journalists whose role is to inform the public.

Suffice it to say that an attack on journalists is a direct attack on media freedom and the right to inform – a constitutional right which should be enjoyed by every citizen.

Article 18 of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1977, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights clearly state that freedom of expression is an inalienable right. Any act that interferes with that freedom should be condemned and the perpetrators dealt with.

The decision by police to assault, beat up journalists and detain one of them on the pretext of dispersing riotous students is unjustifiable and proves how the authorities can deliberately violate journalists' right of livelihood and the constitutional right to information.

The assertion by the Geita Police Regional Commander, Mponjoli Mwabulambo, that police beat up the journalists after mistaking them for rioting students is a lame excuse that cannot justify the assault.

This is because the students were in school uniform. The journalists were in civilian clothing and were thus quite distinct from the students. They had cameras and notebooks and therefore there was no way police could have mistaken them for students.

Furthermore, the incident attracted other members of the public, and one wonders that if police were really dispersing people who had gathered at the school, why was it that only journalists were assaulted and not other people who were around.

The fact is that police were out to ensure that journalists were prevented from reporting what was taking place at the school. On whose interest, nobody knows.

Police harassment of the journalists killed the story on the students. There were reports that some of the suspended students were spending nights in betting houses in Geita town for lack of bus fare to go to their respective homes.

Journalists are scared to follow up the story for fear of police reprisals. This is unfair, not only to the journalists and the profession, but also to the suspended students, whose plight could not be known because the pens that would have reported their problems had been silenced.

In general, relations between journalists and the authorities in Geita Region are not cordial, and the procedure for journalists to get information is cumbersome.

For instance, journalists are not allowed to report anything from the regional hospital unless they have permission from the Regional Administrative Secretary. Additionally, journalists have no right to get information from public schools without permission from the Town Council Director.

We believe that these cumbersome procedures have been deliberately put in place to make it difficult for journalists to obtain information from public offices, which is a flagrant violation of media freedom.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Having seen what transpired at Geita Secondary School, the investigation team has the following recommendations to make:

9.1 Journalists:

Journalists should take harassment by police and other state agents seriously and start taking legal action against the culprits. It is unfortunate that the female journalists who were assaulted by police and teachers did not seek legal redress. They viewed the assault as part of the challenges in their work. This is wrong. Journalists should know that they are not supposed to operate at the mercy of police or other people in positions of authority. They have the constitutional right to earn a living and the right and duty to inform the public about what is going on. Journalists should individually and collectively through their press clubs stand up to end this impunity by taking legal action against the perpetrators. Journalists should also strive as much as possible to report incidents of press freedom violation to the MCT Press Freedom Violation Register.

9.2 Police

Police have the duty and responsibility to keep and maintain law and order within the confines of the law, and media practitioners as well have the cardinal duty of disseminating information to the public. This is why even when the President has an important statement to make or occasion to preside at he does not engage police to do the job but invites the press to get the message across.

Police should therefore live and let live. They should understand that much as they have a duty, journalists too have a role to play in the development of the country.

They should strive to establish a professional relationship with the media, and not an adversarial one, while respecting each other's boundaries.

Police should also refrain from using excessive force against unarmed journalists and all the time view them as partners in pushing ahead the country's development.

9.3 Media houses

Most journalists working in the regions have no contracts with the media houses they work for, and even when they get into trouble linked with their work, very few media houses act promptly to assist them.

Media houses should ensure that every journalist who works for them has a valid contract and ensure their security. Whenever they are assaulted by police or any other state agent, they should get prompt help, including legal assistance.

9.4 Media Associations

Press clubs and MCT should conduct sensitisation seminars on the rights of journalists. They should be enlightened on their constitutional right to gather and disseminate information so that they can stand up and fight for their rights whenever they are trampled on by the authority. Furthermore, MCT should assist journalists who are assaulted by police to file court cases as part of efforts to end police impunity once and for all.

There is an urgent need to establish a media trade union in order to address labour rights of media practitioners. The revelation that most journalists work without contracts is alarming and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Media associations should take up a pivotal role to ensure that a trade union is in place as soon as possible.

Media associations should strive to see to it that DEFIR resolutions are adhered to by all stakeholders as acceded to.

9.5 The Authorities in Geita

It has come to the team's attention that the procedure for journalists to access information from the authorities in Geita is not helpful at all. The team is convinced that the procedure has been devised to prevent the media from reporting what is happening in public offices. This defeats the whole concept of openness in public affairs and violates principles of good governance. It is the team's recommendation therefore that MCT organises a dialogue between the media and the administration in Geita Region to discuss the issue of monopoly of information by a few public leaders in the region and make it possible for journalists access information easily.

Appendices

- 1.0 Statement by the Geita Press Club barring media coverage of activities involving police in Geita
- 2.0 Statement by the Geita Secondary School student assaulted by schoolmates



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